1. Near the beginning of the film, Thomas says, “You know, there are some children who aren’t really children at all. They’re just pillars of flame that burn everything they touch. And there are some children who are just pillars of ash, that fall apart if you touch ‘em. Me and Victor – we were children born of flame and ash.” What does Thomas mean by this? What images of fire and ash appear in this film?

2. What aspects of this film deal with situations unique to Indians, and what aspects concern universal human themes?

3. Near the end of the film, Thomas asks Victor, “Do you know why your Dad really left?” Victor replies, “Yeah. He didn’t mean to, Thomas.” What didn’t Arnold mean to do? What does this exchange reveal to us about Victor and Thomas?

4. Thomas’s monologue at the end of the film is adapted from “Forgiving Our Fathers”, a poem by Dick Lourie, a non-Native author. The film’s version of the poem is given below. How does this poem work as a conclusion to the film?

   Maybe in a dream.
   Do we forgive our fathers for leaving us too often or forever?
   Maybe for scaring us with unexpected rage, or making us nervous because there never seemed to be any rage there at all?
   Do we forgive our fathers for marrying or not marrying our mothers?
   For divorcing or not divorcing our mothers?
   And shall we forgive them for their excesses of warmth or coldness? Shall we forgive them for pushing or leaning?
   For shutting doors?
   For speaking through walls, or never speaking, or never being silent?
   Do we forgive our fathers in our age or in theirs? Or in their deaths?
   Saying it to them or not saying it?
   If we forgive our fathers, what is left?

5. Our images of ourselves and of other people come not only from our experiences of ourselves and of other people, but also from movies, television, books, and other media. How do we conform or break these images?

6. Read the following comment by Sherman Alexie. Do you agree with his understanding of fiction? What do you see as the role of Thomas’ stories in the movie?

   “It’s all based on the basic theme, for me, that storytellers are essentially liars. At one point in the movie, Suzy asks Thomas, “Do you want lies or do you want the truth?,” and he says, “I want both.” I think that line is what reveals most about Thomas’s character and the nature of his storytelling and the nature, in my opinion, of storytelling in general, which is that fiction blurs and nobody knows what the truth is. And within the movie itself, nobody knows what the truth is.”